

A New Grave Complex in West Pakistan

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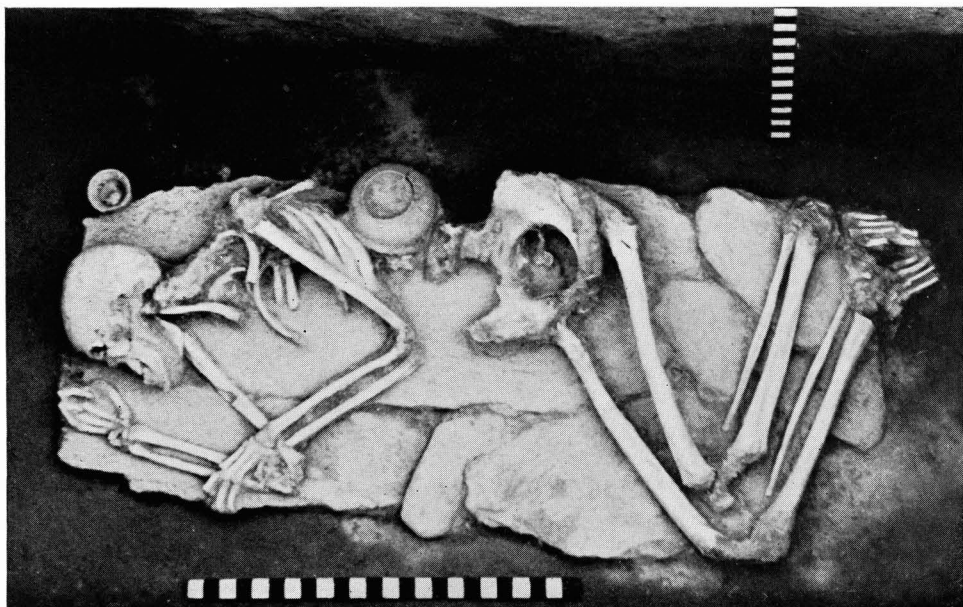
Very little has been found in West Pakistan to bridge the gulf between the Bronze Age Indus Civilization and the early Buddhist cultures of the historic period. A few sites of the first millennium B.C. and some late cairn burials were noted in the hill districts of Baluchistan,* but they remained ill defined. In the meantime the Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan, led by Professor Tucci, accidentally discovered three sites of Bronze and Iron Age cemeteries near Mingora in Swat State, West Pakistan. They include graves of different periods with a good amount of pottery, some bronze objects and one doubtful example of iron. The discovery of such graves for the first time led to an enquiry into the pre-Buddhist remains in this part.

An exploration conducted by Dr A. H. Dani in the northern part of West Pakistan, particularly in the region of Gandhara, showed a widespread distribution of this grave complex. Local people refer to them as *kafir* graves, and wherever important Buddhist remains, particularly habitation mounds, are located, these *kafir* graves are invariably found under a stand of shady trees. They have so far been located in a number of sites in Dir State, viz., Timurgarha, Ziarat in Talash Valley, Chakdara, and Thana in Lower Swat. Similar graves have been noted in the Peshawar Valley near the Panchpir hill, not far from the bank of the Indus River. Thus in extent this grave complex occupies almost the whole of Gandhara, west of the River Indus and goes up to the western border of Pakistan. These graves have so far not been sighted in the alluviated region of the main Peshawar Valley. On the basis of the present finds it seems that the people buried in them spread out from Bajaur, Dir and Swat into the Kabul Valley along the northern hilly routes.

Wherever these graves are located they occupy higher ground immediately below the hill slope. Though the habitation site is not so far identified, it seems that the people must have lived higher up on the hill slopes. This idea is suggested by the latter-day remains of the Buddhists on such spots. The graves are dug down to under the lateritic outwash which has filled the valley in most cases. Wherever they are found they are seen in quite large numbers and a strange thing is that these sites have continued to be used as graveyards down to our time. Sometimes the Muslim graves are slightly placed apart as at Thana and Timurgarha and sometimes they are erected on the top of the *kafir* graves, for example at Ziarat.

These graves do not appear to be uniform in nature. Their exact condition can be known only after extensive excavations in a number of sites. So far the Italians have carried out excavations at Mingora, and the Archaeology Department

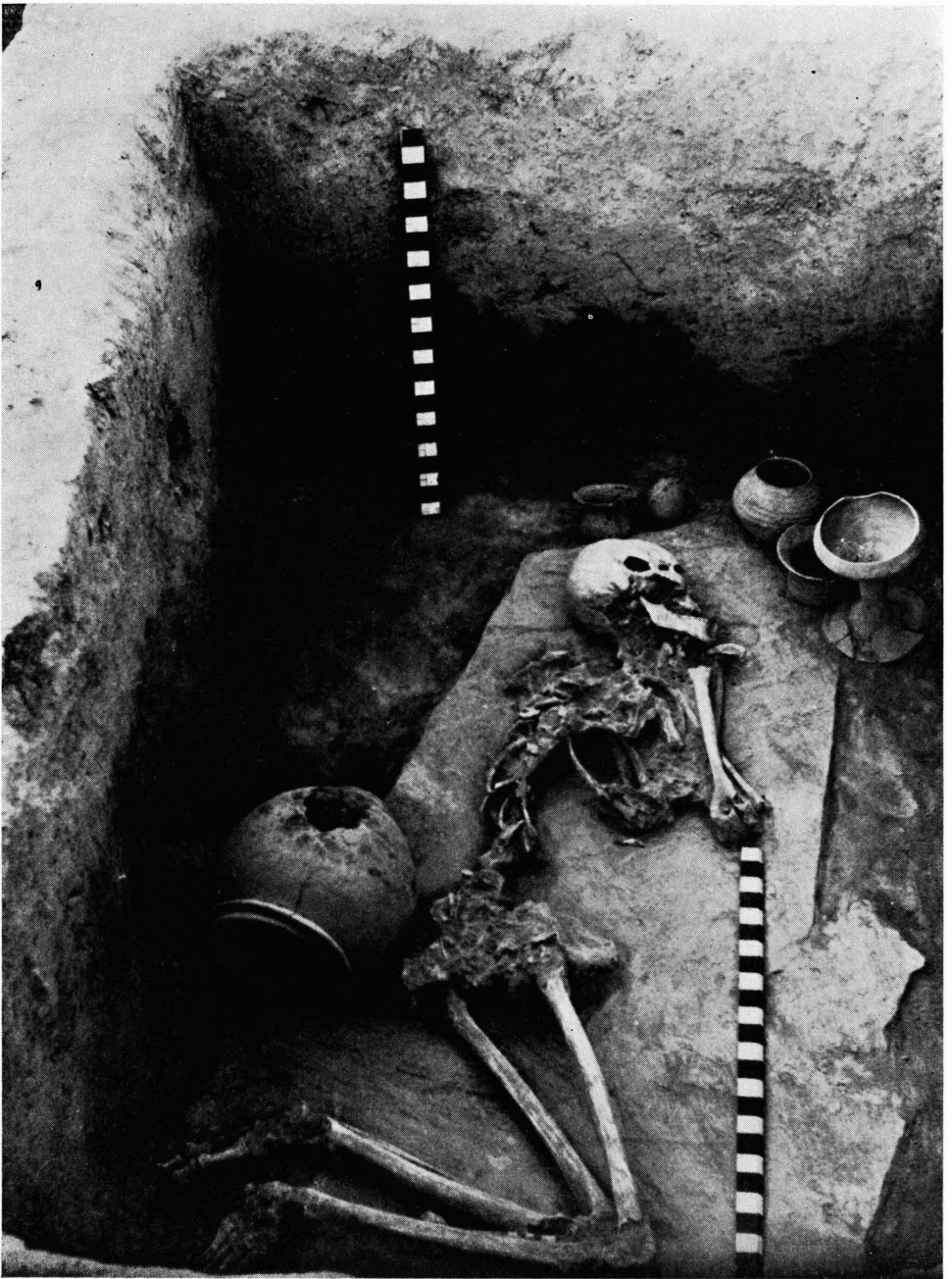
* See D. H. Gordon, *Prehistoric Background of Indian Culture*. Bombay 1960, p.156 ff.



a. Grave with skeleton on a stone slab.



b. Grave, with pots placed near the skeleton.



Thana. Grave with pots placed close to skeleton

of Peshawar University has dug a few graves at Thana, under the supervision of Mr F. A. Durrani. At the time of writing Mr Durrani is carrying out excavations at Timurgarha.

In general we can distinguish at least three main types:

1. A longitudinal grave pit generally covered by one huge stone slab as seen at Ziarat and at Chakdara.
2. A grave pit outlined by stone masonry, sometimes having one or two niches, sometimes partitioned into two and covered by more than one stone slab, placed across the body, as at Mingora.
3. A grave pit dug about 3 or 4 feet down from the original surface. A stone slab is placed on the floor (Pl. Ia) on which rest the skeleton and also the pots. The top is again covered by more than one stone slab placed across the body, and fixed on the ground with smaller chips of stone.

At Thana as well as at Mingora a few pot burials were recovered. The pot found at Mingora has a jar lid with a horse-shaped handle. The relationship of these pot burials with the grave burials is not properly defined.

Leaving aside these exceptional pot burials: in general the graves show inflexed burial, i.e., the legs pulled in towards the body with hands generally joined (some as though in prayer) and drawn towards the head. The face is usually turned towards the east, though in one case it was turned in the opposite direction, probably by mistake. This description applies only to Thana graves. A number of pots are set by the side of the skeleton near the head and body, apparently within easy reach of the hand (Pls. Ib and II). In one case a bronze ear-ring was found in the grave.

The vessels found in the graves are all wheel-thrown and are mainly of two kinds: (a) red slipped jars, and (b) dark-grey drinking vessels and cups. The jars are globular in shape with broad open mouth, apparently to hold grain. Dishes on stands are also in this ware. The drinking cups and vessels are of innumerable shapes. All are finely made and show a very thin section. Some of them are joined, generally three in one group. Some of these cups have small pedestals while others have in-curved sides with a pot belly at the bottom and flaring rim at the top. These pot forms are well known and show links with the pots in the cemetery at Sialk. It is hoped that a detailed study will show a definite chronological link with similar cemeteries in northern Iran and around the Caspian Sea. It is too early to be dogmatic about this grave complex, but a rough dating around 1000 B.C. will not be far amiss.

From the above evidence it is now fairly certain that around 1000 B.C. a new people, using mostly bronze and very little iron, migrated from the Caspian Sea, over the northern Iranian route through Afghanistan and into the northern part of Gandhara. Who these people were is difficult to say. Further explorations and excavations will surely throw light on the problem.